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Trends. Mexico, Illicit Drugs, and Psychological Assessment: Reliability and Validity as Pipe Dreams

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Once again, it has been reported that top-level and elite law enforcement and criminal justice officials in Mexico seem to have been cooperating with illicit drug-trafficking organizations. As usual, these officials had received training, liaison support, and intelligence from United States counter-drug personnel. A new angle to an old story is that the most recently implicated officials were selected for their positions with the aid of extensive psychological assessment.

For these personnel, psychological assessment was multi-modal in nature and comprised background investigations, financial checks, polygraph procedures, and more traditional psychological measures. However, the policy of including psychological assessment as a component of a selection procedure intended to attenuate corruption is extremely problematic.

Problems. (1) Assessing a "corruption index" or an "integrity indicator" in some nomothetic sense encompassing very general socio-cognitive sets or dynamics may have some significant empirical validity--e.g., approaches to (a) antisocial traits or tendencies and (b) moral judgment stages and phases. Empirical validity is much less firm in generating predictive statements about specific behaviors in specific situations for specific individuals. (2) Even if (1) were not a problem, one must note that psychological assessment--more often than not--has poorly considered the deterioration of predictive validity through time as the (a) meaning of assessment stimuli, (b) functioning of populations and population samples, and (c) nature of social, cultural, political, economic, and historical ecologies change. (3) The deception detection indices of most psychological assessment instruments and procedures that are constructed to minimize intentional distortions of responses to assessment stimuli are crude, invite manipulation by assessees, and afford alternative interpretations. (4) Psychological assessment often embraces both a Pollyanna and dispositional perspective on crime--e.g., the former, that most individuals engaging in corruption with drug-trafficking organizations do so by choice as opposed to coercion; the latter, that crime is generated largely through traits and dispositions as opposed to situational variables (with significant interactions at times with traits and dispositions) suggesting the converse of the fundamental attribution error. (5) Psychological assessment's strengths are often corrupted by so-far unresolvable cross-cultural issues that are crucial when confronting global crime. (6) The very language of scientific psychology too often is implicated in a subjugating discourse suggesting that prediction and control over human behavior is exact, automatic, and machine-like.

Policy mandating psychological assessment as a contributor to corruption- busting may be sound politics to demonstrate resolve but an unsound mining of science as technology in an era of globalization. (See Chan, D. (1996). Criterion and construct validation of an assessment centre. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 69, 167-181; Foster, S.L., & Cone, J.D. (1995). Validity Issues in clinical assessment. *Psychological Assessment*, 7, 248-260; Golden, T. (September 16, 1998). Elite Mexican drug officers said to be tied to traffickers. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Lees-Haley. P.R. (1997). Attorneys influence expert evidence in forensic psychological and neuropsychological cases. *Assessment*, 4, 321-324; van de Vijver, F.J.R., & Poortinga, Y.H. (1997). Towards an integrated analysis of bias in cross-cultural assessment. *European Journal of Psychological Assessment*, 13, 29-37; Zimiles, H.

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